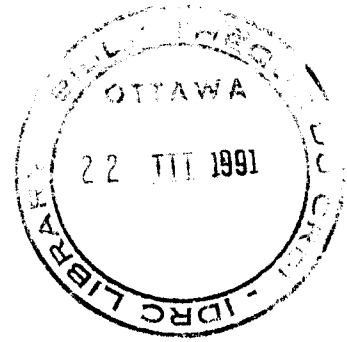


IDRC-LIB



Closing Remarks

Ivan L. Head

Chairman, Vth International Conference on AIDS

Montreal, 9 June 1989

Nous en sommes déjà au moment de partir.

This Conference began 4 days, 19 hours, 10 minutes ago. It will conclude less than 10 minutes from now.

In these several days, this building has echoed to terminology and vocabulary that has ranged from the scientific to the scatological, from the precise to the pedantic, from the wise to the waffle.

No observer would have missed, however, the demonstrable commitment that formed the core of this conference. The commitment of dedicated researchers engaged in one of the most puzzling challenges science has ever faced. The integrity of other professionals who have found that humanism is neither alien nor burdensome to their efforts in their clinics, in their classrooms, in the streets. The courage and insistence of persons unable to walk away from this disease, those among us who reminded us daily that we came here to help them.

This week's avalanche of information reflected the social concerns and the scientific accomplishments of the wealthy countries of the North, and as well of the developing countries of the South. Participants from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America demonstrated to us, as IDRC has

long known, that their contribution is not simply welcome, but is a vital element in this momentous struggle. From North and South, the reported epidemiology bore one strikingly common characteristic: poverty. Poverty which mutates everywhere into powerlessness. Poverty which invites discrimination. Poverty which evokes hopelessness.

The response to that factor inside these walls and, I sense, well beyond, was more than simple courteous accord. It was a response that will stimulate society's efforts to be more aware, to be more understanding, to be more responsible, to be more generous, to be more demanding of ourselves and of our governments.

Events here this week - those that were planned and without doubt those that were not planned - have changed the image of AIDS. We here and those millions elsewhere following the conference through the efforts of the media have been shocked at the evidence of ignorance, and have been shamed at the evidence of discrimination. Equally we have all been encouraged by the dedication of so many, and heartened by the promises of hope from scientists both natural and social. There is not likely any other single

event that can so galvanize and educate opinion makers about AIDS than these remarkable annual conferences.

We have learned that the future is not what it used to be. And that is good news.

Our attention here has been focussed, and properly, in this tantalizing virus and on the fate of those that it has infected, or threatens to infect, all the while remembering those that have died. That was the raison d'être of our week together. We were reminded at the outset by President Kaunda, however, as I remind you now, that AIDS is not the only manifestation of poverty.

Worldwide, standards of living for most people in most developing countries are deteriorating. Lower per capita income. Inadequate nutrition. Poorer health. Less education. Personal insecurity. Most significant of all, absence of hope for any improvement.

Among the many elements contributing to those ends are population growth and environmental destruction. In the main foyer of the IDRC building in Ottawa - close to the 21st Century Award which was presented last year by Sigma Xi, the

Science Honours Society, acknowledging IDRC as the organization in the world best preparing society for the next century - is an unusual clock. In one of two digital readouts, the real time population of the world is revealed; in the other is the worldwide stock of arable land, measured in hectares.

Since 5 o'clock Sunday, when this conference opened (or when I had thought it would open) until 11 o'clock this morning, the clock reveals that the world's population has increased by 1,080,124. That's the equivalent of the population of Nairobi and not much off the population of Montreal.

In the same period the stock of arable land has decrease by 29,325 hectares, or 115 square miles. The population of the world at 11 o'clock this morning was 5,156,101,130. That's more than twice what it was just 40 years ago.

This is the world in which we all now live. It is a world which has made considerable positive strides in the eradication of certain infectious diseases, one which has reduced illiteracy, one which has introduced self-government

into scores of former colonies. It is as well a world which is part of our daily lives and from which we can neither escape nor from which we in the North can isolate ourselves. We in the North are dependent on a wholesome natural environment, we are dependent on peace, we are dependent on a global trading system. Additionally, as societies that claim to be decent, our sense of self-respect is dependent on human dignity elsewhere.

It is in that world that AIDS challenges us all. North and South, infected or not, we all live with AIDS and we must all, each in our own way, join the struggle. As with any struggle worth the effort, it will not quickly conclude. It requires the investment now of resources that will not bear full fruit for years to come. From the Conference we must insist that opinion makers and decision takers understand - whether they are in political, academic, or religious communities. We expect nothing less of them and ourselves than what Dr. Brock Chisholm, the first Director General of the World Health Organization, and a distinguished Canadian, said repeatedly that the true measure of maturity is the ability to anticipate and prepare for the future. An infant, he said, anticipates only the next feeding. A child can look forward to a birthday or a holiday event. An

adolescent is planning her or his career. A mature individual, said Dr. Chisholm, thinks and plans for the future of children and grand-children. A mature society plans now, and invests now, in activities that will benefit future generations.

Those that prepared this conference understood Dr. Chisholm's message. Were I to recite to you all their names, those on the Steering Group, those in the three sponsoring organizations, those on the Secretariat, the volunteers, and the coordinators, I would impose shamelessly on your time. However, were I not to acknowledge the contribution of the person responsible for the Program - the essential core of this Conference - I would be remiss. On your behalf, I pay tribute to Dr. Richard Morisset of Montreal, the Chairman of the Program Committee.

Pendant la semaine qui s'achève, nous avons été les invités privilégiés de cette très belle ville et de ce magnifique pays.

Tout au long de l'organisation et du déroulement de la Conférence, nous nous sommes efforcés de refléter les valeurs de notre société canadienne. Nous avons voulu non

seulement faire connaître ce que nous sommes, mais aussi ce que nous voulons être. J'espère de tout coeur que nous avons réussi. Je suis convaincu que les attentes que nous avons de nous-même, en tant que Canadiens, ont été dépassées, à cause de ce que nous avons vécu et partagé ici cette semaine.

To close this conference, I can think of no better way than to share with you some words of Frank Scott, Montrealer, Canadian, civil libertarian, jurist, poet, humanist.

He wrote:

The world is my country
The human race is my race
The spirit of man is my God
The future of man is my heaven.

I thank you all for your participation and your support. I have been very touched by my days with you all.

Cette V^e Conférence Internationale sur le SIDA est terminée. A tous, merci, et meilleurs voeux. A l'année prochaine à San Francisco.